

SCHOOL DISTRICT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

Minutes of Meeting
Thursday, April 13, 2006
Pima Community College, Tucson

Commissioner Dave Naugle called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and attendance was noted by the secretary.

Members Present

Rita Leyva
Vicki Anderson
Michael Hunter
Art Harding
Dave Naugle

Members Absent

Martin Schultz
Jay Blanchard
Kent Scribner
Joseph Thomas
Dr. Sandra Dowling
Doris Goodale
George Martinez
Thomas Schoaf

Speakers Present

Dr. Linda Arzoumanian, Pima County School Superintendent
John M. Clark, Oracle Elementary District #2
Patrick Schifano, Oracle School District
Dr. Kenneth Brown, Continental SD #39
John Dougherty, Tucson Chamber of Commerce
Richard Searle, Valley Union High School, Cochise County Supervisor
Bruce E. Brown, Bowie U.S.D #14
Roger F. Pfeuffer, Superintendent, Tucson Unified School District
Clare T. Bonelli, Patagonia Union High School
Christopher D. Maynes, Sentinel District

INTRODUCTIONS AND REMARKS:

The meeting was called to order at 6:35pm by Commissioner Naugle. About 40 members of the public were in attendance. Commissioner Naugle invited the public to take comment cards, information packets including establishing legislation and important contact information for the commission and a map of Pima County school districts.

Commissioner Naugle said he will show a PowerPoint to give background on the Commission but the key objective of the meeting is to hear comments from the public.

Commissioner Naugle pointed out that some of the Commission's process is defined by legislation. There are three public hearings scheduled of which this is the second. The previous meeting was in Prescott and the next one will be in Phoenix. In addition the Commission members have been meeting each month. Next week's Board meeting will be at the ASU Decision Theater which promises to be a great resource and tool.

Commissioner Naugle finished his welcoming remarks by saying that he will go through the PowerPoint and move quickly into public comment.

See attached PP

Commissioner Naugle talked about the importance of communities of interest and that the Commission needs to deal with these communities very carefully. He reminded the audience to submit their comments to the Commission through public comment, email, phone or mail.

Linda Arzoumanian, Pima County School Superintendent (did the maps)

Ms. Arzoumanian welcomed the Commissioners to Pima County, the 3rd largest county in the United States. She read about the Commission's concern for the distances children travel. She wants the Commission to continue to be mindful of this concern, particularly for schools on the border that could be 45 miles or 55 miles away. She also expressed that she wished there were more public input hearings scheduled. She would like to see a public hearing in Yuma.

Commissioner Naugle says the Commission wanted to hold these first three hearings really quickly and they would like to do more. Commissioner Leyva said that the Commission could use help from rural county superintendents in scheduling future hearings.

Christopher Maynes of the Sentinel district in Maricopa County said their motto is "Small but proud." He added that the sentiment in his town is that they hope to heck they don't find us out here. He said he has been in his one tiny school district for 11 years. The closest high school is one they don't want to be a part of. They are an unincorporated area. He doesn't understand why the law allows that if the voters vote no on a proposal, there is another opportunity to go back to the ballot but if it is accepted they are stuck. Their idea is that when the time is right, a high school will be built out there and then they unify, but they don't see someone circling something on a map. Maybe it would make more sense to unify with a different county school if this is possible.

His is a common school. Students can go to Antelope High School and they pay tuition there. They go 70 miles one way. Some go to Gila Bend. They pay tuition to both. They are both a long way off. To circle them together on a map they would lose their autonomy. Every where he looks on Interstate 8 houses are moving in. They tuition

seven students and have about 50 students total. He will send some more input to the Commission through email.

Commission Rita Leyva said bi-county districts are ok and that is not a problem.

Michael Hunter thanked Mr. Maynes for the important perspectives. The school boards were not supportive of the legislation even though bill reflects some of their concerns. He thinks it is wise to wait until growth comes to the district to add a unified high school. Unifying a school with its neighbors willy nilly doesn't make sense. Commissioner Hunter says he doesn't think Sentinel is a district likely to be recommended to unify. There are many school districts in Pima County that a recommendation to unify would not make sense. It is more likely that recommended unifications will be in Yuma and Maricopa Counties.

Commissioner Hunter said that recommended unifications will be somewhat controversial, because anyone who wanted to unify would have done so already. The governing boards can be an obstacle. The Commission is not waiting for the boards to make a resolution for unification.

Commissioner Hunter offered an example: Tempe has two feeder districts. There has been some support for unification from the high school. Kyrene doesn't seem to think this is a good idea. If the Commission suggests unifying Tempe Elementary, Tempe High School and Kyrene the voters could vote this down. Depending on how you interpret the law, maybe Kyrene could become its own unified district and Tempe Elementary and Tempe High School could then unify in a subsequent vote.

Commissioner Hunter said sometimes the obstacle to unification is not governing boards, but funding issues. Even if it is rational academically to unify, a district could lose small school funding and taxing authority; so the decision to unify would not make sense for funding reasons.

John Clark, Superintendent of Oracle Elementary School District #2, noted that Patrick Schifano, Betty Harmon, Nellie Doran and Susan Beaman are Oracle School Board members who attended this meeting with Mr. Clark. Mr. Clark said that Oracle celebrated the 100th anniversary of their school district in 2005. There was a time when Buffalo Bill read to their students.

Mr. Clark handed out packets of information (attached) regarding a hostile consolidation effort, pushed by the Mammoth-San Manuel School District to consolidate with the Oracle School District. The San Manuel district sought the consolidation to alleviate problems caused by declining enrollments and increasing taxes for education in the district. Oracle opposed the effort to consolidate. Based on their interest in maintaining their autonomy and identity and to continue to allow their district elementary students to have their own choice of high schools plus the concern that consolidation would increase taxes the Oracle school board did not support consolidation. The San Manuel contingency circulated petitions (the legality of which were unsuccessfully challenged in

court) and succeeded in securing a vote on the consolidation. The consolidation effort was defeated at the ballot (650 yes; 3251 no). The strongest vote against consolidation came from Saddle Brooke, a community of retirees who do not have children in school (2323 of 2863 voted no).

Mr. Clark said that Oracle is attractive to other districts who want to acquire their assessed valuation. He said that they have people in both communities who want to keep the identity of their districts and would be happy to talk to the commission.

Mr. Clark recommended that if the Commission is going to work on redistricting to stick to Pima and Maricopa Counties and leave them alone.

Commissioner Hunter said he understood there are concerns from rural districts. People are wary when government says it is going to help. He said that Oracle is also a type 3 district and in his read of the bill these districts are not in the charge of the bill. Commissioner Hunter said he didn't think this district is one the Commission will be concerned with. Maybe a few type 3s will be in the recommendations but the Commission's hands are full with other potential unification recommendations. He said there are five districts in southern Yavapai County that could be combined and the Commission could fill all its time with just that.

Commissioner Naugle said that the School Facilities Board (SFB) has a rule that would permit the building of a high school when there are 350 students. Right now they have 209. Hopefully they could have their own high school.

Commissioner Hunter said that the Oracle District could vote for unification now, and not wait until the SFB builds a school, but finance and build one themselves.

Commissioner Naugle said the Commission needs growth and demographic info. The sunbelt is now considered to span from Prescott to Sierra Vista. Land in Casa Grande with no utilities is selling for \$60,000 acre. Commission needs to look where growth might be.

Patrick Schifano, Oracle School Board member said that he brought a printed statement (attached) on explosive growth in Pinal County. He asks that the Commission make no recommendations for their unification because of the upcoming impact of planned development for both Oracle and San Manuel-Mammoth. He says that unification will provide no educational benefit for their children. Also, unification could require students to spend more time on the school bus. They are exploring the possibility of becoming their own unified district pre-kindergarten through high school.

Dr. Kenneth Brown Superintendent of Continental School District #39 said to please check the calendar when scheduling hearings in the future. Tonight is Passover and you would have had greater attendance. Also, please be sure to give the room number for future meetings.

The average age in our unincorporated community is 72. There is a highly performing school. Dr. Brown has only been there two years but finds they have small classes, great teachers and great programs supported by the governing board. Superintendent Horne asked for more volunteers and they already have 100 every week. Athletics and academics go hand in hand. They do everything that large districts can do. His experience writing a doctorate on the subject led Dr. Brown to advise the Commission to not use the words "redistricting," "unification" and "consolidation" interchangeably. He said he makes \$69,000 year and he does many jobs for district. His concern is that if they join Sahuarita they would have to bus their students.

Dr. Brown asked who will pay for Commission recommended elections? He asked why should the school district have to pay for the election. He said that in his district a vote to unify will fail because of taxes. If they joined any number of districts their taxes would double. Why would a retiree want any changes? Their school is highly performing and striving to be an excellent school. They have a great curriculum. Their teachers did not get a raise. They are on the SFB list and will probably be ready for a high school in three years. He said their county superintendent is a big help because they are so small. He thanked Dr. Arzoumanian.

Commission Naugle said that he has been on Dr. Brown's campus and it is beautiful.

Commissioner Leyva said that it is undecided who pays for the elections. The sentiment is the legislature should pay.

Commission Hunter said that once we know where we are going we need to ask for a mechanism or possibly an appropriation for funding this.

Commissioner Hunter said that Type 3 districts on their own - not in a group of Type 3s - are not likely candidates for unification. He told Dr. Brown that speaking only for himself, they are not on the Commission's radar screen. He suggested that maybe some clarification would be useful as the Commission proceeds as to who is likely to be a candidate for unification.

Commissioner Hunter said that school districts like Vail, Tanque Verde and Ruth Fisher are all Type 3 who likely will need a high school in the future. Commissioner Hunter said this could be called the Vail syndrome and the Commission would not put them on list for unification. These are schools with a long history as a common elementary district. Later they transport or tuition students to a high school.

John Dougherty of the Tucson Chamber of Commerce, Director of Government Affairs, said it is great to have the real people of Arizona taking testimony. He said they hit it on the head saying that the bottom line is taxes. He said that business pays more in taxes than homeowners due to the higher assessment ratio for businesses and no access to the homeowners rebate. His organization asks that the Commission keep local control in mind. They want districts that are just the right size for optimum performance. He

provided written remarks prepared by the Tucson Chamber to the Commission (attached). They will add further comments on transportation costs at a later time.

Commissioner Hunter said that in Arizona there are complex tax treatments for property. The politics of what we are talking about gets dicey because of the different ratios. A \$100,000 home is treated very differently than the \$100,000 bicycle shop down the road.

Richard Searle, Valley Union High School Board member and Cochise County Commissioner said that right now counties pay for elections. He said he was here to speak for himself. Valley Union has four feeder schools. Enrollment is 190; if unified would be 500 plus. There is a curriculum challenge at the high school when kids come in with such diverse backgrounds. It is hard to meet AIMS requirements. They need summer school to get everyone on the same page for math. He believes unification benefits outweigh problems. Also, there is a big financial impact if they lose small schools money.

Commissioner Hunter spoke about the homeowners rebate saying this could insulate homeowners from primary tax increases that redistricting could create. Although businesses would pay more than homeowners they can't vote to impact this. He agrees that the Commission should remain aware of the impact of taxation issues. He added that it is ironic that the state provides for a uniform education system. If a district is blessed with nice property values and another district is not blessed it causes huge inequities. This is one of the motivations for legislation to help homeowners in these situations.

Commissioner Naugle said that Cochise County could go to nine districts from two. He asked what kind of hearings the Commission could have to discuss this?

Commissioner Searle said that often parents are receptive of unification but the boards are not. The boards fear of loss of control. Rural communities are tied to their schools and they identify with them. The key to getting support for unification is to provide some cost savings, better pay for teachers and more funding for programs. He said communities need to try to do this at a grass roots level. Communities should identify what makes the most sense. Combining five schools in his district could save one half million dollars.

Clare T. Bonelli, Patagonia Union High School said that she is hearing that the bottom line is taxes. She hopes academic achievement is the bottom line and the most important thing. She said she is glad Dr. Brown said Sonoita (125 kids) is highly performing. She said that given the demographics they are doing extremely well. She said we were one of the first to pass English AIMS and we were coaching other schools. We received the small schools teacher of the year award. She asked if academic achievement will be taken into consideration by the Commission.

Art Harding, Director of Legislative Affairs for the Arizona Department of Education said that he was representing the position of State Superintendent, Tom Horne. He said academics are what the Department of Education is after. His job is to make sure the

state gets better academics. He said that aligned curriculum gets better academic achievement. Successful redistricting is not about district size, it is about aligned curriculum. Commissioner Harding said to Ms. Bonelli that his job is to make sure that your good scores follow you. He said that if you are doing a good job on your own that is ok. Some high schools say that they have no control of the academics of those students coming in. We want to ask how to improve that situation.

Ms. Bonelli said that Sonoita feeds into Patagonia High School. Patagonia Elementary School is aligned with Patagonia High School. Sonoita used to be aligned but with a change of administration that has changed. She said they have provided bus and food services in the past through IGAs (inter-government agreements). She said they can align curriculum with IGAs. She said their Superintendent oversees everything so she can't see any potential for cost savings.

Commissioner Hunter said the Commission is not forcing unification on anyone. The voters make the decision. He said Ms. Bonelli makes a good point about taxation vs. kids. There is tension. Your clients are both your students and your taxpayers and you have to please both. He said that the Commission doesn't intend to interchange the terms unification and consolidation but it is pretty clear that in Patagonia if you unify; you also consolidate. Both Patagonia and Sonoita (100 students each) get the small school adjustment, but would lose this if unified. This is a serious tension between taxpayers and kids.

Ms. Bonelli said that they are concerned that the legislature is going to dump the cost of elections on the school districts. It was suggested that Commission attend ASPA county meetings.

Commissioner Hunter said that currently the school districts do pay for elections. He expects there will be legislators who jump at chance to host legislation that will take the cost burden off school districts.

Roger Pfeuffer, Superintendent of Tucson Unified School District asked what is the Commission's interest in TUSD? He said there is a rumor that the Commission will break up large districts. He asked if the Commission believes there is an optimum district size?

Both Commissioners Hunter and Naugle said this is not what the Commission will do.

Bruce Brown, Superintendent and Principal of Bowie U.S.D. #14 in Cochise County asked what happens in a three way election when two districts vote yes and one votes no?

Commissioner Naugle answered that all three districts need to approve.

Commissioner Hunter said there was an earlier version of the bill that would have forced one district to comply with two others who voted for three-party unification. The sponsor of the bill, Senator Linda Gray, happily changed that. All three districts need to approve

the recommended unification. He said that Bowie is not on the Commission's list to unify. In Bowie there is no rationale to "consolidate."

Commissioner Naugle said that he was certain the Commission will hold meetings in outlying areas. He asked everyone in the audience to stay involved in the redistricting process and assist in getting voter involvement.

Without objection the meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Submitted by Marlene Johnston